Social Media and EFL Learning Process

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Abstract: *Recently, social media has emerged as a technological tool that promotes learning in both academic and public settings. Students usually discuss and exchange academic content on social networks to improve their education. However, given the extensive infiltration of social media into academia, its effects require careful examination. Thus, the goal of this research is to investigate how it affects the process of learning English in contexts where it is being used as a foreign language (EFL). Additionally, it seeks to ascertain how using social media in Omani classrooms affects EFL students' learning. This study investigates the function of social media by providing a broad overview of the various forms of social media and social networking sites, the application of social media in the EFL classroom, social media use in education, social media engagement, social media and student accomplishment, social media research in Omani higher education, and the difficulties associated with each of these. This research finds that when students are encouraged to utilize their mobile devices as learning aids, they can get the most out of these mediums. It's recommended that social media applications should be incorporated in the descriptions of English language courses at Omani institutions.*

Key words: social media, learning, academic settings, EFL classroom, engagement

INTRODUCTION

Social media is an online tool for producing and sharing content that encourages people to share information and media (Evans, 2014). Additionally, social media facilitates interactions and dialogues between two or more people. Social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, Instigram and Google have a lot of potential to support online learning by giving students access to data that will allow them to expand, refine, and enhance their knowledge (Bin-Hady & Al-Tamimi, 2021; Gaytan, 2013). Today, there are many options to assess learning and motivate students due to the quick advancement of technology and the explosive growth of social media (Bin-Hady et al., 2020; Gikas & Grant, 2013).

Many people, particularly students, rely on social media for everyday communication. In fact, it is now a commonly used technological learning aid for both academic and public use. According to estimates, 1.93 billion people use mobile devices to access social media websites every day (Regan, 2015). Social media usage skyrocketed by 176 million users. In 2015, there were more than 2,206 billion users worldwide, making up 30% of the total. Since social media usage is so common among student communities worldwide, school administrators could incorporate social media technologies into the learning processes of EFL students. These allow people to watch, learn, and impart knowledge to others in their communities.

Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to investigate how social media affects the process of learning English in contexts where it is being used as a foreign language (EFL).

Research questions

1. How do social media interactions affect EFL learners' language proficiency?

 2. How might social media platforms help EFL students study collaboratively?

 3. What effects does social media use have on students' involvement in EFL classes?

 4. What effects does social media use have on the attitudes and motivation of EFL students toward language acquisition?

 5. How might social media help EFL students and native speakers communicate and comprehend one another's cultures?

 6. What difficulties do EFL students have while utilizing social media to improve their language skills?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature will include earlier studies on social media. Topics to be discus include:

The Language of Gadgets

Users can select the language they want to use on devices such as laptops, desktop computers, and mobile phones. These options will surely benefit all users in different ways, but it's interesting to note that new users stand to benefit the most. Choosing English as their preferred language for their devices has benefited many, according to multiple studies. People improve their second language acquisition in a range of language learning contexts (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social Networking Sites and Social Media Types

Numerous social media platforms that can be used in a variety of ways have been made available by technology (Duong, 2020). The ability and willingness to use them to their fullest potential for learning may occasionally be lacking, particularly in academic settings. For example, even though most people own smartphones, they rarely utilize every app that is included with them. They frequently lack the time or opportunity to dedicate themselves to learning new things, and they occasionally receive subpar instruction (Al-Ahdal & Shariq, 2019). This isn't the case for English language learners, though, as smartphone apps and software can facilitate social interaction. The available social media and networking sites are examined in the section that follows.

Twitter

According to Murthy (2011), people value social networking and microblogging sites' 140-character limit the most. Since this straightforward setup is the only communication method that has captivated users' attention, it has evolved into an engaging way for students to stay in touch with one another. Both with the instructor and on their own. Twitter has been linked to several English language studies. Espinoza-Celi et al. (2018) assessed the effect of Twitter use on enhancing students' reading comprehension, while Mompean and Fouz-González (2016) investigated the influence of Twitter in pronunciation classes. Conversely, Montaner (2020) investigated how well Twitter works to improve students' writing abilities.

Blogs

Apparently, one of the social media platforms is an online blog. Millions of people have created their own blogs, which they use to share news and thoughts on a wide range of topics. They invite readers to reply to their blogs by leaving comments or adding to them. Blogs are said to be beneficial and cover a variety of topics. Language learners increase their reading comprehension, use proper syntax, increase their vocabulary, and read more quickly (Aydin, 2014). There are many different applications and goals for blogs. For example, by reading an English-language blog, students studying the language can pick up new ideas about how people interact with one another through blogs. Reading (Yakut & Aydın, 2017), writing (Sanjaya et al., 2020) and expanding one's vocabulary are all advantageous in several contemporary scenarios now. According to some scholars, blogs' simple, understandable language makes them an excellent tool for converse with others who lack their level of sophistication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Instigram

Instagram is classified as a visual-based social networking site, mostly used for sharing photos and videos. It may have a major effect on schooling in several ways. Instagram's focus on photos and brief videos, for instance, can improve visual learning. Teachers can produce interesting blogs that explain and enhance students' comprehension of difficult ideas, Ezzat, M., and Jiang, H. (2020). Additionally, Instagram enables connections

between teachers and students outside of traditional classroom settings. By facilitating the discovery of material relevant to users' interests, hashtags encourage cooperation and idea exchange between educators and students worldwide, S. Veselow (2014). Moreover, through posts and stories, educators and educational institutions may exchange materials, study advice, and inspirational material. Students may access a range of instructional resources and get real-time information by following these accounts, Khasawneh, M., and Alharbi, A. (2021). Through the projects displayed on their profiles, students may artistically express themselves. A feeling of personal engagement in their education may be fostered by including painting, writing, photography, and even science activities.

Instagram has many advantages, but it also has drawbacks, such as the possibility of distraction, false information, mental health problems, S. Veselow (2014).

Facebook

Blattner and Fiori (2009) claim that this social networking site is one of the most well-known and quickly growing websites on the Internet, with over a billion users. Additionally, McLoughlin and Lee (2008) noted that Facebook can be used for several purposes, such as sharing content, communicating, changing learning results and teamwork in completing tasks. But the main reason students used Facebook was to stay in touch with their friends.

Using social media in the classroom

The student communities have never used electronic social networks as much as they do now. Technology has gradually made its way into the field of education, despite the initial belief that it should only be used for amusement (Top, 2012). Numerous free and reasonably priced apps are available in app stores that might greatly benefit the scholarly community. Utilizing these tools helps create a culture that is centered on social media, which inevitably affects how people communicate, educate, and learn (Mao, 2014). Lau (2012) asserts that students are encouraged to start learning activities through online social networks. Students who use social networking sites online can expand their knowledge since they have access to a wealth of communication and information-sharing options. Mao (2014) investigated the benefits of social media for high school students, how they viewed these contemporary technologies, and the associated issues and worries with social media use. The findings demonstrated that students' attitudes and opinions regarding the use of social media in the classroom are positive. Students specifically mentioned that social media could improve their learning and that they liked using it for informal, individual, self-study or homework. Nonetheless, a few students thought social media was distracting and time-consuming (Mao, 2014). The results of the study also show that scaffolding is necessary for the use of social media in teaching and learning. Recently, the use of social media in English language learning has been the subject of numerous studies (Al-Ahdal, 2019; Ariantini et al., 2021; Li, 2017).

Social media and involvement of students

As previously mentioned, numerous studies have documented a positive correlation between learner engagement and social network use (Alharbi et al., 2021; Fujita et al., 2017). Likewise, other research has discovered a link between technology use and engagement (Chen et al., 2010; Faizi et al., 2013; Ha et al., 2018; Junco et al., 2011; (2022) Tkacová et al. Chen et al. (2010) investigated how Web-based learning affected students' engagement and learning outcomes in both online and traditional classroom settings. According to the study, students felt very involved and active. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that students who use social networking sites in their coursework advance academically overall. A study by Tkacová et al. (2022) examined social media use during the COVID-19 epidemic. According to the survey, most teachers utilized social media for virtual instruction. Students were eager to embrace social media for studying as well. In 2011, Junco et al. conducted an experimental study using Twitter to develop different features of academic presentations. They discovered that Twitter may be used as a teaching tool to promote participation and teamwork.   Additionally, using Twitter as a microblogging platform might improve communication among students by creating a feeling of community. In addition to promoting active learning, the Twitter assignments allowed professors to provide prompt feedback (Revere & Kovach, 2011).

Due to their unpredictable value of collaboration in the learning process, social media applications help students access, share, and gather information. Furthermore, social networking helps students to (a) make meaningful connections with their peers (Yu et al., 2010), (b) increase their engagement and communication with their colleagues and tutors, Alharbi et al., 2021; Fujita et al., 2017) and (c) collaborate to achieve common goals (Faizi et al., 2013). Additionally, it's probable that some students will feel more comfortable sharing and expressing their thoughts online (Ali & Bin-Hady, 2019). Instead of focusing on traditional teaching methods, online social networks allow students to work together on ideas, discuss them with peers, and post them in a way that allows for revisiting and revision.

Social Media and Academic Performance

Social media can help students connect with one another and create online communities, which enhances content learning. By investigating new resources and using social media as a tool to facilitate learning, interact with communities, and collaborate, students can improve their learning environment. As a result, numerous studies have assessed how social media affects students' academic performance (Safwat et al., 2020; Tambunan & Mukhyidin, 2022).

Al-Rahmi and Othman (2013a) investigated how social media impacted the academic performance of college students. The results demonstrated how social media integration enhances students' academic performance by making their academic experience easier. Furthermore, it was discovered that using social media in the classroom improved

communication. between the instructor and students, increasing involvement and enhancing group projects. In a similar vein, Tambunan and Mukhyidin (2022) investigated how social media impacted the growth of students enrolled in Islamic religion courses during COVID-19. According to the study, most students use social media for educational purposes. Additionally, it was noted that social media has a positive impact on students' academic performance. Moreover, Olaleke et al. (2015) found that social media encourages interactions between students and instructors, which enhances learning abilities. Social media on the internet, specifically, can help young learners achieve academic success by fostering a discussion-friendly environment that boosts motivation for learning.

EFL Students and Social Media

Social media's importance in attaining academic success has received a lot of attention. Language and communication abilities are unquestionably essential for imparting knowledge regarding the use of technology in the classroom (Al-Ahdal & Alharbi, 2021; Espinoza-Celi et al., 2018; Montaner, 2020). Facebook and other social media sites, such as Twitter and WhatsApp, improve communication as well as the vocabulary of EFL students (Pikhart & Botezat, 2021). To encourage student participation, many of these have been incorporated into academic course materials. This allows students to interact with others, gain knowledge from them, and expand and share what they have learned. Social media has been connected to better language learning and can be utilized in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, according to Holmberg (2019). Boonmoh (2010), for example, discovered that including blogs into ESL writing sessions may encourage students to write and foster their originality. Similarly, Puthikanon (2009) found that employing WebQuests in ESL reading classrooms had a comparable effect. Furthermore, Ali and Bin-Hady (2019) disclosed that using WhatsApp in the Saudi context helped EFL students develop language proficiency and reduced their anxiety. According to Al-Ahdal and Alharbi (2021), MALL was a useful tool for expanding the vocabulary of Saudi EFL students.

Social media in Omani higher education EFL context

Social media has grown in importance as a teaching tool in universities throughout the world, including Oman. It makes it easier for students, teachers, and the educational community to collaborate and communicate. Institutions in Oman have adopted social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to increase student involvement, advertise academic events, and create a feeling of community.

According to research, social media can help students learn academically by enabling them to interact with teachers and classmates outside of the traditional classroom, promoting casual conversations and resource sharing (Al Maashri & Zainuddin, 2021). Social media also plays a key role in raising cultural awareness and showcasing the accomplishments, activities, and innovations of higher education institutions to a wider audience. This raises their profile locally and internationally, drawing in potential students and partners (Al Badi,

2020). Social media may be used by students to access academic resources such as online workshops, seminars, and chances to network with specialists in the field. In terms of skill development and professional preparedness, this can have major advantages (Al-Harthi, 2022).

However, there are drawbacks to using social media in this situation, including privacy issues, false information, and the possibility of distraction (Al-Harthi, 2022). Al Maashri & Zainuddin (2021) assert that although social media might improve educational opportunities, it can also serve as a source of distraction. Students' academic performance may suffer if they find themselves focusing on other things instead of their studies. Socio-economic issues may cause differences in students' access to social media, which might make it difficult for all students to participate fairly in digital learning opportunities. To engage all students, institutions need to be aware of these differences and think about inclusive tactics (Al Badi, 2020). Guidelines and best practices are becoming increasingly necessary as educational institutions deal with these issues to make sure social media improves the learning environment without sacrificing academic integrity.

Difficulties with Using Social Media

One could argue that social media use has lessened the difficulties faced by language teachers in recent decades. How to encourage students to use social media for their own gain and to advance their English language proficiency is currently a challenge. However, the use of these resources in the classroom begs the question of how well students can strike a balance between their academic and personal lives. The study by Al-Rahmi and Othman (2013a) states that students' use of social media should be monitored and controlled since it may negatively affect their academic performance. According to a study by Baylor University researchers, students spent more time on social networking sites for entertainment-related purposes, such as following athletes or reading the news (Wood, 2014). Furthermore, several students mentioned social media as a helpful study aid, but they also pointed out certain drawbacks, such as the subpar home Internet (Al-Rahmi & Othman, 2013b). Considering these findings, researchers continue to debate the role of social media in education and whether it promotes student participation or acts just as a diversion. More information is needed to determine whether social media is a useful tool for accelerating learning.

The effects of AI on higher education institutions

AI's effects on universities are complex and represent larger worldwide patterns in pedagogy and educational technology. First, by developing customized learning pathways for students according to their learning preferences and speeds, AI can personalize instruction, W. Ali (2021). Both student involvement and results can be enhanced by this customized strategy. AI may also automate administrative duties like scheduling, grading, and admissions procedures, freeing up academics and staff to concentrate more on instruction and student assistance. Al-Mahrouqi, T., and Al-Muqbali, A. (2021).

Additionally, AI can analyze enormous volumes of data to offer insights regarding institutional efficacy and student achievement, Al-Harbi, K (2020). This can improve educational results by assisting teachers in identifying students who are at risk and putting assistance plans in place for them. Additionally, incorporating AI into the curriculum might help students get ready for a workforce that is becoming increasingly reliant on technology. Students may obtain critical skills for future employment markets through programs in machine learning, data science, and AI applications. Lastly, AI may support research by making data analysis, modeling, and simulation possible, opening the door for creative breakthroughs and advances in academia, Schneider, E., and Mourad, M. (2020).

However, there are drawbacks to integrating AI as well, including the requirement to train faculty on new technologies, remove biases in AI systems, and ensure data privacy (Al-Harbi, 2020). To get the most out of AI, institutions will need to properly manage these obstacles.

All things considered, if the right steps are made to solve these issues, AI's influence on Omani higher education has the potential to improve learning environments and results, increase institutional efficacy, and promote an innovative culture.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study includes a systematic review of previous research and literature on the subject. The researcher first conducts a comprehensive literature search using academic databases. After then, a selection of relevant studies and articles are read. Once relevant items have been selected, key information is extracted from each source. The collected data is then subjected to a thematic analysis. This might include the benefits of utilizing social media, challenges students and instructors face, and other technological related issues. The next step is to critically evaluate the quality and reliability of the reviewed research. This involves assessing the methods, findings, and applicability of the original research in several educational situations.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

The reviewed literature revealed that social media provides dynamic and real-world circumstances for using English. Several research have demonstrated that it can boost student motivation and involvement in language acquisition. When utilizing social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, or language-specific forums, learners frequently say they feel more involved and connected. Additionally, social media has been shown to enhance a variety of language proficiency. For instance, casual conversations and peer review on social media sites like Twitter are frequently beneficial for writing. While reading and listening skills may be enhanced by consuming English-language literature, speaking abilities can be enhanced through voice communications and video chats. Moreover, students can collaborate on projects, exchange resources, and assist one another in

collaborative learning settings made possible by social media. It is frequently stated that this collaborative element improves communication ability.

Findings also revealed that social media can facilitate cross-cultural communication between EFL students and native speakers, assisting students in comprehending cultural context and subtleties—an essential component of language learning. Furthermore, regular use improves digital literacy, which is necessary for social media engagement. EFL students become more adept at interacting with multimedia content, navigating online environments, and critically analyzing information.

Despite the advantages, the reviewed literature revealed that learners may also encounter challenges, such as information overload, distractions, or the risk of encountering inappropriate content. These barriers can hinder the effectiveness of social media as a learning tool. Teachers' assistance is frequently necessary for the successful integration of social media into EFL instruction. Teachers must address possible hazards and create suitable plans for integrating social media into the classroom.

Discussion

There are significant hurdles as well as transformational potential when incorporating social media into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) study process. To shed light on the effects of social media use on language learning, this section synthesizes the results of the reviewed studies while exploring the subtleties and complexity present in this changing educational environment.

The improvement of student motivation and involvement via social media is among the most important discoveries. While Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok provide a feeling of community and promote real-world English interactions, traditional language learning approaches frequently fail to keep learners' attention. Real-time communication with peers and native speakers gives language learners the chance to hone their abilities in relaxed settings, which boosts their confidence and willingness to participate. This is consistent with social constructivist ideas, which highlight the value of communication and teamwork in the educational process.

The potential of social media to improve a variety of language abilities has been especially notable. According to research, learners' writing skills may be greatly enhanced by informal writing on sites like Twitter and language-focused forums, where they can get immediate feedback from peers and native speakers. Similarly, watching multimedia content on websites like YouTube helps improve listening skills since it exposes students to a variety of accents, idioms, and cultural settings. The casual character of social media material, however, can also result in the adoption of non-standard language forms, which learners need to be helped to properly traverse.

Social media is an effective instrument for promoting cross-cultural communication and cooperative learning. Students may collaborate on projects, exchange materials, and have

conversations that cut across national borders. This exposes students to a variety of viewpoints and lifestyles, which has important ramifications for developing intercultural competence. Teachers must take a cautious approach to this, too, making sure that interactions honor cultural sensitivity and foster tolerance.

Social media integration in EFL environments is not without its difficulties, despite these advantages. The learning process might be harmed by problems including information overload, diversions, and the possibility of inappropriate online conduct. In addition, not every student has equal access to technology, which can make differences in educational possibilities worse. By setting rules for proper social media use and offering sufficient assistance to enable students to use these sites efficiently, teachers may significantly lessen these difficulties.

In conclusion, there is a lot of potential for improving motivation, engagement, and language acquisition by using social media in the EFL learning process. But only with careful application and an awareness of the nuances involved can this potential be fulfilled. Teachers may use social media to create a dynamic and successful language learning experience by creating a supportive learning atmosphere, offering sufficient supervision, and addressing the issues surrounding its use. In addition to highlighting the potential benefits of social media and language learning, this discussion lays the groundwork for future studies in this field, opening the door for creative EFL teaching methods in the digital era.

Implications for research and findings

The ramifications of the relationship between social media and EFL instruction highlight how intricate and varied language instruction is in the digital era. Adopting a paradigm that not only recognizes social media's creative potential but also critically analyzes the difficulties and moral dilemmas related to its use is crucial as research advances. To provide richer, inclusive, and successful language learning experiences that satisfy the demands of the twenty-first century, educators, academics, and policymakers may collaborate by tackling these topics.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, academics are convinced that social media helps people learn English. Social media platforms aid in preparing ELF students to share, communicate, and search for information. Numerous studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects that these platforms have on improving learning. Students in EFL classes are obviously glued to their phones. particularly when they are asked to use the devices to finish an assignment or look up a word's definition. Without a doubt, educators can take advantage of their students' passion and dedication to technology and turn it into something useful for the classroom. However, the benefits and impacts of social media, as demonstrated by empirical research, clearly demonstrate the necessity of investigating the degree of social media integration.

Future research

In today's knowledge-based society, research establishes the direction for future action in every field, including academia. Therefore, scientific research on the effect of social media on language learning outcomes in the Omani context is desperately needed. Meanwhile, adhering to international standards, educators should be encouraged to use social media in the classroom and carry out action research because students and teachers are the best people to assess the situation on the ground. Variables like proficiency and gender may be included in such studies to make the outcomes more wholesome and usable in other contexts. Additionally, students must be taught how to use social media platforms for learning in a positive way while deliberately avoiding the distractions that come with them. Lastly, educating educators about academic social media pedagogies

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